

PRESCOTT HOUSE
(Headquarters House)
Beacon Hill
55 Beacon Street
Boston
Suffolk County
Massachusetts

HABS MA-1323
MA-1323

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PRESCOTT HOUSE (Headquarters House)

HABS No. MA-1323

Location: 55 Beacon Street, Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts. The House is located within the Beacon Hill National Historic Landmark District, and was designated as an individual NHL in 1964.

Significance: The William Hickling Prescott House, at 55 Beacon Street, and the adjacent 54 Beacon Street, were built by 1807 for the Boston merchant, James Smith Colburn. These Federal period twin houses overlook Boston Common, and have been attributed to Asher Benjamin (or possibly Peter Banner). William Hickling Prescott, a historian trained at Harvard, lived at No. 55 from 1845 until 1859. He was one of the first English-speaking historians to write about the Spanish Empire, researching not only the monarchs but also the conquests of Mexico and Peru. After Prescott died in 1859, his widow stayed in the house until her death in 1872. At that time her nephew, Franklin Gordon Dexter, bought the property. The Dexter family replaced the original spiral staircase with the present colonial revival staircase. In 1944 the house was purchased by the Massachusetts chapter of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America.¹

Materials: There are field measurements for No. 55 Beacon Street dating from June of 1932.

¹ Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), Inventory No. BOS.4089; and the website for the Colonial Dames, www.nscda.org, accessed 06/09/2008.